



April 5, 2004

Guilty plea to firearms charges in theft of guns in Woonsocket

Leo Bergeron, 23, of no permanent address, has pleaded guilty to federal firearms offenses in connection with the theft of five guns in Woonsocket last April. Bergeron was arrested in June following a two-month investigation by **Woonsocket Police** and the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives**.

The Office of the United States Attorney announced the guilty pleas, which Bergeron entered on April 2 before Chief U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres in U.S. District Court, Providence. Bergeron is detained pending sentencing, which is scheduled for June 25.

At the plea hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter F. Neronha said that, had the case gone to trial, the government would have proven that, on April 25, 2003, Bergeron stole five firearms from an apartment on Knight Street in Woonsocket: four semi-automatic rifles and a .40 caliber pistol. Bergeron subsequently sold the guns, which Woonsocket Police recovered from the Blackstone River on May 31. Bergeron was arrested on June 23.

Prosecutors from the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Attorney's Office jointly reviewed the case as part of **Project Safe Neighborhoods**, a Department of Justice initiative against gun crimes. In December, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Bergeron with being a felon in possession of firearms and possessing stolen firearms, the charges to which he pleaded guilty. Bergeron has a prior felony conviction for domestic assault.

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The statutory maximum sentence for each offense is ten years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine. Bergeron's sentence will be determined on the basis of guidelines that rely on such factors as the specific nature of an offense and a defendant's criminal background, if any. One of the weapons that Bergeron stole, a Norinko SKS model 7.62x39 semi-automatic rifle, is considered an especially dangerous weapon under federal law and will subject Bergeron to a sentencing enhancement under the guidelines.

The **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives** and the **Woonsocket Police Department** investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Neronha is prosecuting it.

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